

An Educational Perspective on Narrative and Ethnography: A Monolithic Study

Attia Noor

University of Cumberlands, USA

Abstract: Narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research that explores human experiences through lived or told stories to understand a phenomenon. Narrative researchers collect data through spoken or written stories and life experiences of an individual (subject). The data is examined in chronological order to understand the meaning of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). The researcher unfolds the hidden meanings in spoken or lived stories by analyzing the data in relation to social and cultural context. Narrative methodology is used to explain the behaviors or experiences of either an individual or a small group of people. Ethnography is a holistic approach to the study of cultural systems using both qualitative and quantitative methods with ontological and epistemological properties. It is greatly dependent on fieldwork. It is a process of discovery, making inferences, and continuing inquiries to achieve emic validity, while being an iterative process of learning episodes. It is also an open-ended emergent learning process, and not a rigid investigator-controlled experiment.

Keywords: Narrative, Ethnography, Ethics, Communication, Postmodernism

Citation: Noor, A. (2023). An Educational Perspective on Narrative and Ethnography: A Monolithic Study. In M. Shelley, V. Akerson, & M. Unal (Eds.), *Proceedings of IConSES 2023-- International Conference on Social and Education Sciences* (pp. 345-350), Las Vegas, NV, USA. ISTES Organization.

Introduction

Narrative methodology is collaborated on by both researcher and participant. as the feelings and ethical dispositions of both shape the inquiry (Clandinin, & Huber). Historical origins of the narrative or story telling connects with the evolution of human linguistics and social life. Numerous authors maintain that moreover postmodernist rationale or social constructionism not only accounts for the reproaches of modernist rationale but lays out a basis for the application and understanding of narrative. Social constructionism calls for a foundation of knowledge in the background of its social collaboration. It highlights the communal and traditional nature of narrative dissertation. Postmodernism thrived on the modernist viewpoint that assumes wisdom and universal truth and applied scientific empirical methods to problem solving. Postmodernism, which came into use during the late 20th century, questions the notion of objective truth adopted by preceding pragmatist and realist methods. This philosophy highlights background construction of connotation and the rationality of numerous viewpoints; knowledge is built by individuals and groups of people; reality has several perspectives; truth is

grounded in ordinary life and social relations; life is a text, and a narrative rationalizes that text so one can make sense of it (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003).

Gerhard Friedrich Müller is considered the father of ethnography. He was a traveler and developed the ideas of ethnography as a unique area of knowledge. The education and association with academics gave Müller unique opportunities in his time, where he had a chance to become a participant in the Second Kamchatka Expedition (1733–43) as a professor of history and geography. This involvement in the expedition gave him ample time at hand to work on the concept to differentiate from the work of *Völker-Beschreibung*. This curriculum later became known as "ethnography," following the introduction of the Greek neologism *ethnographia* by Johann Friedrich Schöpperlin and the German variant by A. F. Thilo in 1767 (Vermeulen, 2008). The Siberian expedition allowed Müller to gather knowledge about various peoples and cultures, and he collected data for the creation of maps. He also described and categorized clothing, religions, and rituals of the many different Siberian ethnic groups.

State of the Art Study

Creswell, (2013) described following four sub-types of narratives. A Biographical Narrative is a story that recounts the important proceedings and facts about a person's life from a first-person perspective. The researcher of a biographical narrative designates the life events in chronological order and highlights the significance of the events. Autoethnography is a form of narrative methodology of qualitative research. The researcher uses self-reflection and presents his/her personal experiences and connect this autobiographical story to broader social, partisan, and communal meanings and understandings for the reader. Life History is another sub-type of narrative, which captures the entire life story of an individual. Finally, the Oral History, is the assortment and learning of historical information about people, relations, significant measures, or ordinary lifecycle using audiotapes, videotapes, or records of prearranged discussions. These discussions are directed with individuals who contributed in or observed historical proceedings and whose recollections and insights of these are to be conserved as an aural record for future generations.

Realist Ethnography and Critical Ethnography are two types we use in this area of research. Realist Ethnography deals with realist thinking in terms of an objective account of the situation. The adaptation of realist ethnography allows the observer to use third person speech to elaborate on the observation and what they have heard from the participants. The ethnographer endeavors to remove all personal biases or political motivations when giving this objective account.

The next type of ethnography is Critical Ethnography. It seeks to understand the ways in which power relations shape people's identities and their experiences, as well as having a focus on underlined biases to challenge social injustices (Dutta, 214). This type of ethnography seeks to govern representative mechanisms, to extract ideology from fulfilling societal norms, and to comprehend the reasoning and conduct of research subjects within historical, cultural, and social frameworks.

Major Thinkers and what they Contributed

As Polkinghorne (1988) mentioned, Bruner (1986, 1991) and Lyotard (1984) distinguished narrative as having two types, namely, “logico-scientific” and ‘believable narrative,’ which is not necessarily true. Authors have presented these relying on dissimilar events for authentication, with narrative expressing positioning around the meticulousness and specificity of what happened, and the active participation of humans making sense of objects in the stories. Hence the term narrative describes making sense of the events and happening in everyday lives with respect to social context. Polkinghorne (1988) views narrative as a major way of making sense of human experiences in their social context. Gubrium & Holstein (2009) emphasized analyzing the narratives to capture the true meanings of the stories. Gubrium & Holstein (2009) also discussed the importance of interpreting the narrative from different perspectives to get at its true essence (Bamberg & Cooper, 2012).

We can find in the research of Boyle (1994), who has suggested that a “central tenet of ethnography is that people’s behavior can only be understood in context.” As per this article’s earlier discussion, we came to know that the procedure of following a rounded view of a certain group frequently comprises ecological and historic reflections which help the ethnographer get an advanced understanding of the context in which an individual or group operates. At the same time though, the importance in ethnography is placed not on distinct social actions, as is repeatedly the case in positivist methods, but on how interactive procedures are related. Earlier to this study Spradley (1979) commented that ethnography is not so much about studying people as it is about learning from them. Ethnography is the process of learning about ethnographic hosts’ worlds or cultural systems, as their socialization into or experience with these systems has rendered them as experts on various aspects of these worlds. Here are a few thinkers of note, who worked with Ethnography in great depth.

Marcel Mauss (1872-1950)

Clifford Geertz (1926-2006)

Paul Farmer (1959-) ...

Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942)

Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) ...

Eric Wolf (1923-1999) ...

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) ...

Ruth Benedict (1887-1948)

Goals of the Two Methodologies

The main goal of the narrative is storytelling, by hearing the words of the unheard. The stories we hear matter, probably almost as much as the stories we heard as children, told to us by our parents and other elders (Gubrium & Holstein ,2009). These stories give us an understanding of what is, what could be, and what should be. The other vital goal of the narrative is formulating an expectancy of such stories with a structure, with protagonists

and villains, a hill to be climbed or a battle to be fought. These scenarios are also known as contexts. Narrative research allows us to form contextual understanding of a situation and persona, of the story's subject. Storytelling also involves creating an understanding of cultures and the norms within those, the behavioral traits of tribes, etc. Observations, recording of stories and creating titles with relative material are also important goals, which a researcher can look into, while conducting a study using several narrative techniques for clarity and conciseness.

Ethnography is a qualitative investigation technique established on the assortment of culture at home and wherever that may be, as well as overseas. Ethnography is a hands-on, experiential learning technique that involves immersing oneself in a culture or group of people to learn about their way of life. It is used to but not limited to, learning about people's social, cultural, or religious practices as well as their beliefs and values (Healy, Beverland, Oppewal, & Sands, 2007). For these explanations, ethnographic lessons narrate numerous fields of study and several kinds of individual experience. These count, for example, education overseas and community-based or intercontinental internships.

The primary goal of Ethnography is trying to understand how people live their lives in a social setting in terms of their cultural norms and actions. Ethnography is not like traditional market research, rather an ethnographer visits people, who can be consumers in their homes or offices, to observe and listen in a nondirected way to conduct behavioral study about some product. The goal is to see people's behavior on their terms, not from the direct perspective of an ethnographer. While this observational process may look inefficient, it educates us about the background in which customers of some cable company would sign-up or subscribe for a new channel or use a new product and the meaning that product might hold in their lives. This means understanding of context is also an important goal. For instance, contextual decisions play a significant role in our lives, such as when someone or some group of people make some decisions to either congregate peacefully or join a protest.

Description of Methods Specific to the Methodology

These are specific methods which we use in Narrative Research.

Story Telling: This deals with gathering life stories of one or more individuals. The stories can be told orally or recorded in a journal or diary through observation.

Interviews: The life stories collected using interviewing methodology. An aspect is asked questions to get the facts to relate with the experiences, such as successes and failures. The researcher can also collect data by collecting documents such as letters or photographs, or other memorable items, to develop a story (Creswell, 2013)

Ethnography is used to describe how a cultural group works and to explore their beliefs, language, behaviors, and issues faced by them. This study can extract information related to the power, resistance, and dominance

within some social settings by applying the observational approach, by not being biased or judgmental. At this step, we incorporate interviewing. The identification of the cultural context of a certain group to study is another milestone to achieve. Such a group of people should have been together for an extended period, so that their shared language, and patterns of behavior and attitudes have merged into discernible patterns. This method can be described as pattern extraction. At this step, we incorporate the Participant Observation method.

The selection of cultural meanings, themes, or theories to study about the group is the next target to hit, where an ethnographer can extract meanings, themes and theories to provide an orienting framework for the study of the culture-sharing group. This allows the ethnographer to start the study by examining people interacting in their everyday settings, which are their embodiment and are pervasive to that set of people. At this step, we incorporate the Surveying method.

Analytic Techniques Specific to Methodology

Interviewing is an extremely important technique to record all as mentioned by the interviewee. The ethnographer is not to use memory, as it is not a sufficient source for citation. Interviews must be transcribed in full or at least partially. Though the full transcription provides the most comprehensive data for the researcher to analyze, it is a laborious task and usually very time consuming. However, there are instances where full transcriptions are not useful or needed and transcription of only the key parts of the interview would be essential. The decision of full or partial transcription depends on the research questions one is trying to answer (Mann, 2011).

The Participant Observation technique for the field study is a very hands-on way to keep track of the observations of a certain group of participants. It is most important to take notes in a journal that will allow the ethnographer to notice patterns that might not been comprehended and were ubiquitous in person (Baxter & Chua, 1998). Since, we know that the memory fails, it is imperative to have comprehensive notes taken by the ethnographer of what has been observed. Otherwise, the observations end up being meaningless.

Conclusion

The article discusses the use of narratives and ethnography in research. The authors discussed topics including collaboration, data collection experiences, narrative authority, ethics, negotiation, and storytelling in relation to narrative methodology. The methodology is used across many disciplines including psychology, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, organizational studies, and history. The article also expands upon the role of ethnography in our everyday life. The article also discusses the history of ethnography, its impacts, and the knowledge that can be gained from its documentation. This sets the stage for a more in-depth discussion of methods for data collection and analysis used in ethnographic studies. The articles then describe how these

methods can be used to elaborate on practical issues concerning the selection and use of ethnographic methods by researchers.

References

- Baker, & P. P. Peterson (Eds.), International encyclopedia of education (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Elsevier
- Bamberg, M., & Cooper, I. H. (2012). Narrative analysis. *APA handbook of research methods in psychology*, 2, 77-94.
- Baxter, J. A., & Chua, W. F. (1998). Doing Field Research: Practice and Meta-Theory in Counterpoint. *Journal of management accounting research*, 10.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, J. (in press). Narrative inquiry. In B. McGaw, E.
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dutta, U. (2014). Critical ethnography. *Qualitative methodology: A practical guide*, 89-105.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2009). *Analyzing narrative reality*. sage.
- Healy, M. J., Beverland, M. B., Oppewal, H., & Sands, S. (2007). Understanding retail experiences-the case for ethnography. *International Journal of Market Research*, 49(6), 751-778.
- Mann, S. (2011). A critical review of qualitative interviews in applied linguistics. *Applied linguistics*, 32(1), 6-24.
- Mitchell, M. C., & Egudo, M. (2003). *A review of narrative methodology*. Defense Science and Technology Organization Edinburg (Australia) Land Operations Div.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Suny Press.
- Vermeulen, F. H. (2008). Early history of ethnography and ethnology in the German enlightenment. Abstract retrieved from <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/13256>